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## Contributor to Vatican's New Document on Use of Mass Media Urges Church to Make Communication a Priority

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## *The University of Dayton*

## *News Release*

April 9, 1992  
Contact: Teri Rizvi

### **CONTRIBUTOR TO VATICAN'S NEW DOCUMENT ON USE OF MASS MEDIA URGES CHURCH TO MAKE COMMUNICATION A PRIORITY**

DAYTON, Ohio -- At the "dawn of a new era," Vatican officials are urging Catholic dioceses to develop pastoral communication plans and to learn to use cutting-edge communication technologies at a time when the recession has caused many dioceses to cut funding for their communication offices or lay off staff.

Those cutbacks trouble Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, M.H.S.H., president of Unda-USA, the national organization of Catholic communicators, and executive director of the University of Dayton's Center for Religious Telecommunications.

Zukowski helped write the church's new Pastoral Instruction on Social Communications, released last month by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the media policy arm of the Vatican. During the next year, she will monitor the document's implementation around the world and report progress to the Pontifical Council in March 1993.

Entitled "Aetatis Novae," from the Latin "at the dawn of a new era," the document includes practical guidelines for pastoral planning in communications and is designed as a supplement to "Communio et Progressio," the church's pastoral instruction on social communications issued in 1972. The Catholic church issued the document in response to technical advances in the last two decades and sweeping political changes in the world--from the collapse of Communism in central and Eastern Europe to the growing deregulation and privatization of media in the West.

"My fear is that the Catholic church will wake up at 'the dawn of a new era' in the 21st century and realize it can't speak the language of the new culture because it doesn't know it," Zukowski said.

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Catholic church leaders are beginning to realize the power of the media and its impact upon culture, but very few dioceses have a communication plan and few seminaries and ministry formation programs in the country offer courses in communication, Zukowski noted. "The University of Dayton is the only Catholic university in the country that devotes a center to the study of religious telecommunications."

Zukowski suggests that dioceses develop an "integrated" pastoral communication plan that "weaves itself in all ministries of the church." Even in tough economic times, she said, dioceses can develop more cost-effective communication strategies by planning, budgeting and consolidating communication efforts.

"A better orchestration of financial resources will enable the church to create a stronger presence in radio, TV, computer networks and satellite communications to inspire a strong sense of community among the faithful," she said.

In particular, church leaders must recognize the value of satellite technology. "Catholic schools across the U.S. could be using the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America (CTNA) to offer courses they can't afford," she said. "We don't realize the impact CTNA can have."

The Catholic church in third-world countries has embraced alternative media, Zukowski said, with the emergence of more than 400 radio stations in Latin America, the development of a computer network among Latin American Episcopal Conferences and the use of video cassettes among groups in villages and towns. "They want to understand the media culture because they want a voice. They keep finding creative ways to realize their mission."

In 1989, Zukowski was part of an international team of 18 mass communication experts who traveled to the Italian village of Nemi outside Rome to write the first draft of the pastoral instruction. Since then, she and Russell Shaw, communications director of the Knights of Columbus and former secretary of public affairs of the U.S. Catholic Conference, have submitted two more revised drafts before the Pontifical Council for Social Communications adopted the document on March 17.